

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
February 3, 2022, Minutes
Rembert C. Dennis Board Room
1000 Assembly St., Columbia, SC 29036**

Members Present:

Chairman Mike Hutchins, Vice Chairman Cleveland Smith, Stan Halliday, Martha Herbert, Jonathan Rabon, Titus Duren, Will Shirley, Mac Baughman

Members Absent:

Eddie Kinsey

Members attending via teleconference:

Trey Watford, Sam Hiott

Staff Present:

Robert Boyles, Emily Cope, Billy Dukes, Ken Prosser, Sam Chappelle, Will Dillman, Charles Ruth, Jay Cantrell, Lynn Quattro, Ross Self, Molly Kneece, Preston Chrisman, Kelsey Huffstetler

Others Present:

There were no constituents present.

Chairman Hutchins called the meeting to order.

The minutes of the September 8, 2021, meeting was approved as submitted.

Molly Kneece, State Waterfowl Biologist, provided an overview of her position description and outlined her duties and future objectives in her new role. Her duties include providing technical assistance to field staff on public waterfowl areas, as well as guidance on private lands in areas with high waterfowl potential, collaborating with other waterfowl experts, conducting site visits to monitor their conditions, needs, and progress, coordinating research projects, communicating with the Atlantic Flyway Council's Game Bird Technical Section and the WFF Division's Migratory Game Bird Committee, and assisting the lottery hunt coordinator and regional field staff with scheduling of lottery hunts. Her 2022 objectives include conducting an evaluation of all Category 1 and Category 2 waterfowl areas, monitoring current infrastructure projects to help with development and implementations of upcoming projects, executing an external wetland review, developing a survey to estimate the abundance of waterfowl using Category 1 waterfowl areas, developing research ideas that provide actionable management recommendations for waterfowl properties, and building relationships.

Billy Dukes, Chief of Wildlife, reported on 2021 public dove field results and stated that higher harvest numbers and increased hunter participation were observed during the season. There were a documented 14,709 doves harvested, which was the second highest harvest ever. There was a rate of 4.29 doves per hunter, the highest in 10 years, and a total of 3,427 hunters, the highest since 2015. The top three highest-producing fields were Santee Dam, with 9.53 doves per hunter, Lake Wallace, with 7.88 doves per hunter, and Bordeaux Work Center, with 7.42 doves per hunter. There will be three new fields open for 2022: Love Farm WMA in Richland County, London Creek WMA in Cherokee County, and the White Plains Tract at Belfast WMA in Laurens County.

Preston Chrisman, Freshwater Fisheries Biologist, gave a presentation on an on-going research project taking place at two lakes in the State Lakes program, Jonesville Reservoir and Lake Oliphant. The purpose of the project is to monitor population management through the removal of Largemouth Bass by declining angler harvest with electrofishing efforts to create a balanced fish population. The final stage of the project will take place in Spring of 2022, where they will perform one last mark-recapture event at both lakes and assess if further removal events will continue.

Charles Ruth, Big Game Program Coordinator, and Jay Cantrell, Assistant Big Game Program Coordinator, provided background information on the history and structure of the current suburban/urban deer management program, as well as feedback on the potential outcomes associated with changing the current deer season dates. Restructuring the suburban/urban deer management program would be costly, more time-consuming, and less effective. Capturing and relocating deer often ends in stress-related death due to captive myopathy and would cost an estimated one thousand dollars per captured deer. Potential issues with extending the closing date for deer season include interrupting the small game season, disturbing the gestational period of the doe deer, and trouble discerning sex due to antler shedding.

The Committee made a motion to accept staff recommendations to keep the suburban/urban deer management program, as well as the deer season dates, in their current form, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Emily Cope, Deputy Director of WFF, reported on legislative updates, including the outcome of recent budget hearings, as well as the status of new and current bills. Representative Hewitt introduced a bill to modify current airboat legislation as it pertains to use in certain areas during waterfowl season. Representative Hixon introduced a bill to make technical changes regarding defining and naming several fish species, as well as a bill to allow for more animal capturing and immobilization drug flexibility. Representative Hixon also introduced a bill that would make it illegal to remove or destroy an electronic collar placed on a dog by its owner. Senator Campsen has expressed interest in writing a bill that will require a tele-check system for deer. Representative Lowe's waterfowl bill has moved through the House and is on the way to the Senate. The bill will require that there is a separate position for a Statewide Waterfowl Project Leader, a Waterfowl Advisory Committee, and a ten dollar increase in the duck stamp fee.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee will be held at 10:00 am on Tuesday, May 24, at the Wateree Range in Eastover, SC.

Chairman Hutchins adjourned the meeting.